THE BIG DIG

Produced by Whitefriars in association with the Canterbury Archaeological Trust
This is the story of one of the largest urban archaeological excavations ever undertaken in this country.
Hundreds of archaeologists worked on the site of what was to become the new Whitefriars shopping centre in Canterbury.
What they discovered has helped reshape our view of how the earliest residents of Canterbury lived and worked.
Between 2001 and 2003, the team recorded thousands of objects stretching back to before the Roman occupation.
Over the four years of excavation, over 200 professional archaeologists were employed on the project.
Hundreds of local and European volunteers helped on site and in the back room cleaning the masses of finds.
Visitors were guided by a team of knowledgeable volunteers. Over 55,000 people visited THE BIG DIG sites.
Input from the Trust’s Education Officer made school visits both educational and fun.
A teacher’s pack, funded by Kent Archaeological Society, helped teachers incorporate the experience into the curriculum.
Media coverage was constant throughout the project and regular reports sustained local interest.
EARLY WHITEFRIARS
When archaeologists excavate a site, they dig down through layers of history. The oldest remains are usually at the bottom.
Over 2,000 years ago, Canterbury was a Late Iron Age settlement. This reconstruction is based on remains found near the River Stour.
This Iron Age coin is a rare find
Following the Roman conquest, the settlement gradually developed into the bustling Roman town of Durovernum Cantiacorum.
It had a theatre (centre), public bath house (bottom right), temple precinct (top right) and many houses, apartments and shops.
A major Roman road, timber buildings and town houses were discovered. One huge Roman town house had underfloor heating.
A small oven was found in a Roman town house. It sat on a tesselated floor of brick cubes and was built against a red painted wall.
Fragments of painted plaster from the colourful walls of Roman buildings
Recording a mosaic panel in the corridor of a huge Roman town house - now the site of Goldsmiths/Lloyds TSB
Roman finds: bone die, glass perfume flask, samian pottery with graffiti and bone toggle with carved lion head.
Roman finds: copper alloy pharmaceutical spatula, hoard of copper alloy coins, jet hair pin and bone spoon
Masses of pottery are found on urban excavations. These Roman dishes were probably made locally.
A Roman toddler trod on this roof tile while the clay was still soft!
Several Roman graves were found. This adult female was buried wearing her bracelets. She was found near the site of Tesco Metro.
A rare discovery: this Roman tower was built against the town wall. It will shortly be on view in the cycle centre opposite Fenwick.
ANGLO-SAXON WHITEFRIARS
Anglo-Saxon Canterbury was very different to the Roman town, as can be seen from this 7th century reconstruction!
Anglo-Saxon homes and workshops were built with wood, clay daub and thatch, as can be deduced from remains found in the soil.
The remains of a young Anglo-Saxon woman were found in the rubble of a timber building. Perhaps it had been her home.
Local Anglo-Saxon pottery. It is roughly made, but the beautiful metalwork of this time shows that craftsmen could be highly skilled.
Anglo-Saxon comb made from animal bone
MEDIEVAL WHITEFRIARS
Augustine brought Christianity to Kent in AD 597 and Canterbury went on to become an important royal and ecclesiastical centre.
Excavating the medieval friary church of the Augustinian or White Friars, from whom the new development takes its name
This fragment of stained glass from the friary church illustrates the giving of the last rites.
Common oyster shell used as a medieval paint palette and a bone ‘pricker’ for marking out lines for writing on parchment
The subterranean ‘warming room’ at the friary - perhaps a place where sick friars rested. Two window shafts let in light from above.
Medieval lead seal with St Peter and St Paul and the Latin abbreviation for Pope Nicholas V. It probably bound an important document.
Some of the masonry from the friary was covered in graffiti!
Did ‘thomas bons’ ever imagine someone would find his graffiti in the friary?!
This massive cess tank was built below ground using chalk blocks. It took all the waste from the friary latrines above.
Interestingly, it is now the site for the new public toilets opposite the bus station!
Lots of pots were found at the bottom of the cess tank - probably thrown there when the friary was demolished in 1538.
These jugs were made at the Tyler Hill pottery. They were found buried in the friary grounds.
Fragments of parchment found outside the friary - a very rare find as organic materials usually decompose in Canterbury soils.
A lead ‘test piece’ showing the imprint of a medieval coin
Waste bone material - probably from cutting rosary beads
Gravel Walk lay outside the friary walls. Wheel ruts made by trundling medieval carts can still be seen in the cobbles.
The friary was closed during Henry VIII’s reign. One of the friars - John Stone - refused to accept Henry’s new Protestant religion.
He was imprisoned, then hung, drawn and quartered on the Dane John mound!
20th CENTURY WHITEFRIARS
The Whitefriars estate then passed into private ownership. In 1881, the land was bought for the Simon Langton schools.
Here’s that cess tank again! Contractors working in the Simon Langton school grounds accidently cut into it during building works.
The Simon Langton schools were badly damaged in World War II. The bomb squad was brought in to investigate this discovery.
It turned out to be a Victorian cooking pot!
TODAY’S WHITEFRIARS
The new Whitefriars shopping quarter will be fully trading from Summer 2005
The new Whitefriars shopping quarter will be fully trading from Summer 2005
The new Whitefriars shopping quarter will be fully trading from Summer 2005
The new Whitefriars shopping quarter will be fully trading from Summer 2005
Since the excavations, thousands of finds have been processed and records digitised in preparation for telling the Whitefriars story.
There will be a major publication and displays in the Canterbury museums
Many of the Whitefriars archaeological team have moved on to other projects. Others are helping to compile the final report.
You can follow the illustrated diary of the Whitefriars excavations at THE BIG DIG page on the Canterbury Archaeological Trust web site at:

www.canterburytrust.co.uk
Find out more about the city’s fascinating history by visiting the Museum of Canterbury in Stour Street.
Or the Roman Museum in Butchery Lane, near Longmarket
THE BIG DIG was funded by LandSecurities
Canterbury Archaeological Trust (established in 1976) is a registered charity engaged in the survey and excavation of Kent sites prior to redevelopment. The Trust produces both academic and popular publications and has an active education service.
You can support the Trust and keep in touch with its activities by becoming a Friend. Information is available from:

CAT, 92A Broad Street,
Canterbury, Kent CT1 2LU
Tel: 01227 462062
Fax: 01227 784724
E-mail: admin@canterburytrust.co.uk
All images remain the copyright of Canterbury Archaeological Trust except where otherwise indicated.
Thank you for
watching

This presentation
will begin again shortly